

reduced to 20) desert bird species for the deserts of Pakistan and India (Cowan 1987, 1996), 26 for the rift valley desert of the Gulf of Aden and southern Red Sea region (Cowan 1990) and 14 for the Caspio-Central Asian desert (Cowan 1996), involving 39 different species. Each of the species referred to by name in the previous paragraph would be a desert bird.

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## Range extensions and unusual sightings from Western Province, Papua New Guinea

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The birds of the Tabubil area of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea have now been documented by the papers written by Bell (1969), Coates & Lindgren (1978), Murray (1988a) and Gregory (1995d). The latter added over 75 species to the previous total recorded. The status of some species is altering as habitats change due to settlement, and a number of species such as Pied Chat *Saxicola caprata* and Black-headed Whistler *Pachycephala monacha* have colonised new areas of secondary growth. Losses have been few, with only the Brown Quail *Coturnix australis* and Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis* seemingly gone, the former due to the loss of its grassland habitat at what is now the mine site.

The additions since Gregory (1995d) are summarised below and now bring the Ok Tedi area total up to some 329 species, a very high total given the primarily forest habitats and absence of extensive wetlands or coastline. In addition, distributional information from the remote Kiunga and Obo (Middle Fly river region) areas of Western Province is given in separate sections.

For the present purpose, the Ok Tedi area may be defined as follows: the valley of the Ok Tedi extending south to km 90 on the Kiunga road and northwest as far as Mt. Binnie inside the mine site itself. The Hindenburg Walls (actually some three such structures, spectacular knife-edge limestone escarpments forming part of the foothills of the Hindenburg Range) form a natural boundary to the north, and the survey area extends west as far as the Lukwi valley beyond the village of Ok Ma. The total area is approximately 500 km<sup>2</sup>.

### Additions and corrections for the Ok Tedi area

#### PEACEFUL DOVE *Geopelia striata*

Singles in Tabubil town in February and March 1996 represent a large northward range extension from the southern Trans-Fly. Suitable habitat appears available for colonization as the area is opened up.

#### THREE-TOED SWIFTLET *Collocalia papuensis*

A single specimen captured at Luplupwintem Cave just outside the Ok Tedi survey area in April 1993 was the first such for PNG (Rowland 1994). Conceivably much overlooked. There were some *Collocalia* swiftlets flying about in front of thunderheads at km 9 on the Ok Ma road in October 1995 with several birds looking like something different. They were quite large, with an extremely fast flight more like an *Apus* than the usual *Collocalia* 'dithering', spiky winged and with a slightly forked tail, brownish plumage with a prominent silvery chin

and throat which contrasted sharply with the dull underparts. I think these are likely to be Three-toed Swiftlet *Collocalia papuensis*, but a specimen would be necessary for certainty.

**GREATER MELAMPITTA** *Melampitta lugens*

Discovered on Mt. Robinson in forest with no obvious karst formations at 1000 m on 31 October 1992, with at least 2 birds calling in one area (R. Rowland and P. Gregory). Also heard at two other sites on Mt. Robinson at about 1100 m, from Dablin Creek at 750 m and from km 7 and 9 on the Ok Ma road at 750 m where it occurs in the more usual limestone karst country.

**GRAY'S GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella grayi*

A single *L. grayi* was found in undergrowth at km 9 on the Ok Ma road in October 1995. A probable in March 1992 in similar secondary scrub habitat in the town is suggestive of a passage migrant.

**LEMON-BELLIED FLYCATCHER** *Microeca flavigaster*

Uncommon. A single bird at 700 m at Dablin Creek in early 1993 was unexpected but the species is now regularly found there, with a maximum of 5 birds (probably a family party). Originally thought to be Olive Flycatchers *M. flavovirescens* and listed as such in Gregory (1995d) but subsequent views have permitted a re-identification. The form here is bright yellow beneath with dark legs and a short tail.

**GREY SHRIKE-THRUSH** *Colluricincla harmonica*

A single in Tabubil in March 1996 was an unexpected addition, maybe a wanderer from the Trans-Fly.

**GREY-STREAKED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa griseisticta*

Vagrant, but may be more regular than supposed. The third and fourth records for Papua New Guinea came from forest clearing edge at Ok Menga on 3 November 1991 and 22 November 1992. A spring bird was in Tabubil on 15 March 1996, suggesting that the species may be regular in the area as it is quite frequent in Irian Jaya during the northern winter.

**PAPUAN FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum pectorale*

A common canopy-dwelling species up to about 1500 m locally, often seen in pairs. Omitted in error from Gregory (1995d) but previously recorded by Murray (1988) and Coates & Lindgren (1978).

**A note on two Ok Tedi mysteries**

*Melanocharis* sp.

A female *Melanocharis* recorded as Obscure Berrypecker *M. arfakiana* by Coates & Lindgren (1978) was seen in hill forest at 640 m on 8 February 1978. The yellow pectoral tufts and some orange on the gape or bill base suggested an immature bird. Murray (1988a) reported a similar yellow tufted bird at the plateau edge on 17 April 1987.

At Dablin Creek on 1 October 1992, C. Eastwood and I found two small canopy-haunting *Melanocharis*-type berrypeckers with yellow pectoral tufts and orange bills, but also with faint dark streaks underneath (Gregory 1993a). In July 1993 orange-billed yellow-tufted birds without streaks were common in the same area, haunting the canopy and having a high pitched buzzy song identical to unidentified berrypeckers discovered at Boana on the southern Huon by a Field Guides Inc. tour group in 1991. These Boana birds have yellow pectoral tufts, but also an eye ring, which is lacking in the Tabubil form (B. Whitney and J. Pierson pers. comm.).

Clearly much work needs to be done to reveal the identity of these forms, which may be referable to *M. arfakiana*, or represent an undescribed taxon. Two individuals were collected under permit in July 1994 by Whitney and are being studied in the U.S.A. The form is quite frequent at heights of c. 750–1000 m in the area, now being known from the Ok Ma road and Mt. Robinson as well.

It is also worth recalling that Coates & Lindgren (1978) reported a drab olive *Melanocharis* of the *striativentris/longicauda* type at 2220 m on Mt. Binnie in moss forest, but with strong black streaking down the sides of the abdomen and white pectoral tufts. There have been no further sightings as yet and its identity remains unknown.

#### RED-BREASTED PIGMY-PARROT *Micropsitta bruijnii*

A form resembling Red-breasted Pigmy-parrot, but with a distinctive yellowish cap, is common in the area. This form was first recorded by Murray (Murray 1988b) on Mt. Binnie on 20 September 1987 and was rediscovered by G. Johnston and myself at Dablin Creek on 29 November 1991 (Gregory 1994). There have been frequent sightings since with 40 flying N at Ok Menga at 750 m on 4 October 1992; also 220 flying N there on 25 October 1992; 45 on 8 November 1992, and an unprecedented total of 650 heading NE on 22 November 1992 between 16.00 and 16.45 hrs, in flocks of 50–60 birds with one flock of over 100. Flocks of 20–30 are common at Dablin Creek. A pair were excavating a chamber in a stump at Townsville at 1650 m in September 1992 (photograph of the male in Gregory 1995d).

Reference to museum specimens in Port Moresby, Sydney and Hawaii by G. Johnston suggests some variation in the colouration of males of this species, and the local birds are likely to be within this continuum rather than being a new subspecies.

The Yellow-capped Pigmy-parrot *M. keiensis* is unrecorded from the area (or confused with the other form) but is possible lower down the valley.

#### *Further notes on the plumage phases of the Grey-headed Goshawk*

I recorded a previously undescribed melanistic morph of the Grey-headed Goshawk *Accipiter poliocephalus* in the Ok Ma area in 1992 (Gregory 1995c). A normal phase adult, and an adult of a hitherto undescribed greyish morph, were found at Ok Menga, Western Province, on 21 September 1996. The latter was twice seen well, perched in trees, and watched through a  $\times 30$  telescope on my second

view. It showed whitish underwing coverts in flight, like the normal phase adult seen earlier. Its plumage was otherwise entirely mid-grey, including the head and underparts, with no streaks or bars, quite unlike the usual pale headed appearance. The legs were the normal bright pink, and the cere was also bright pink, extending back to the dark eye which had a reddish ring around it joined to the pink loreal patch. In its head pattern the bird was curiously reminiscent of a Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar*. These New Guinea accipiters remain poorly known, particularly their immature plumages, and the Grey-headed Goshawk is clearly polymorphic in this area.

### Distribution data from the Kiunga area

The Kiunga area, along the upper Fly River some 140 km south of Tabubil, is well-known for a number of rare New Guinea species, and some recent records are given below. New road and forestry developments look set to cause significant changes in the near future.

#### NEW GUINEA FLIGHTLESS RAIL *Megacrex inepta*

Local informants report this species as being not rare in dense sago swamps. A captive individual with a single leg was in Kiunga in August 1994.

#### SOUTHERN CROWNED PIGEON *Goura scheepmakeri*

Still to be found in small parties in the monsoon forest up-river, though extirpated from the immediate vicinity of the town. Birds are quite frequently traded in local markets.

#### VULTURINE PARROT *Psittrichas fulgidus*

This highly-prized species, classified as Vulnerable by BirdLife International, is occasionally seen flying over the river, or along Magazine Road north of the town.

#### LARGE FIG-PARROT *Psittaculirostris desmarestii*

This spectacular and uncommon species is sometimes seen from the river, usually in pairs.

#### LESSER PARADISE-KINGFISHER *Tanysiptera hydrocharis*

Reported in October 1992 from beyond Magazine Road (A. Richards and R. Rowland *in litt.*) and April 1994 about 20 minutes up-river (I. Richardson *in litt.*); sympatric with the Common Paradise-Kingfisher *T. galatea* which is frequent here. A single bird was also found in August 1996, in slightly drier forest than the Common Paradise-Kingfisher (B. Whitney pers. comm.).

#### LONG-BILLED CUCKOO *Rhamphomantis megarhynchus*

Recorded on the Field Guide Inc tours in July and August during the early years of the decade, and again in 1996, about 15 km north of the town on the Drimgas road. This is a significant extension of the known range of this rare and cryptic species from its previous sites

in the Middle Sepik district and around the Port Moresby/Central Province area.

**WHITE-BELLIED PITOHUI** *Pitohui incerta*

This rare and enigmatic species occurs up-river from the town in the monsoon forest, with brown and black bird parties. It may easily be mistaken for a Little Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla megarhyncha* but is stouter, shorter tailed, and pale creamy beneath with fairly obvious diffuse darker mottling on the chest. Prominent dark eye with pale lores, being almost encircled by pale like an eye-ring. Bill pinkish-horn with a darker lower mandible. Legs brownish-pink. One distinctive call was a repeated *tuc*, almost like clicking the tongue, as well as some typical 'pitohui type' musical calls. The birds kept to the mid-stratum, feeding in vine tangles and perching on tree trunks in a manner reminiscent of *Phyllastrephus* bulbuls.

**BROAD-BILLED FAIRY-WREN** *Malurus grayi campbelli*

Discovered by Palliser (1988) in swamp forest between the Kiunga airstrip and the river. There are no subsequent Kiunga records, but it was found in a peculiarly difficult and inaccessible habitat. This may be the only field observation of this form, the Mount Bosavi (extreme southwest of Southern Highlands Province) birds all being trapped and then described as a new species *M. campbelli* (Schodde & Weatherly 1982). Following further research and specimens, it was subsequently shown by LeCroy & Diamond (1995) to be a subspecies of the Broad-billed Fairy-wren *M. grayi*.

**BANDED YELLOW ROBIN** *Poecilodryas placens*

Reported from monsoon forest a short way up-river in April 1994 (I. Richardson *in litt.*). Confirmation is desirable; this would be a significant but not unlikely range extension, as the species is previously known from Mount Bosavi.

**WHITE-SPOTTED MUNIA** *Lonchura leucosticta*

Reported by Palliser (1988) from the airstrip vicinity, and found in April 1994 at Rumgenai some 27 km north of the town. A Trans-Fly species that is on the edge of its range here, Trans-Fly being the lower and middle sections of the Fly river catchment.

**CRIMSON FINCH** *Neochmia phaeton*

Two birds with a White-spotted Munia in kunai grass at Rumgenai in April 1994 were a long way from the known range in the middle Fly River.

**YELLOW-EYED STARLING** *Aplonis mystacea*

Occurs in small numbers with flocks of Metallic Starlings *A. metallica* along the river. The nasal tuft is a useful field character in flight.

**FLAME BOWERBIRD** *Sericulus (aureus) ardens*

The southern form *S. (aureus) ardens* is still to be found along Magazine road north of the town, where the birds fly over at canopy height of an early morning; also quite often seen flying over the Boystown Road. Skins of males are occasionally seen dangling from the driving mirrors of vehicles, where they are a local version of fuzzy dice and clearly an object of status!

**GREATER and RAGGIANA BIRDS-OF-PARADISE** *Paradisaea apoda* and *P. raggiana*

The Raggiana seems to be the species usually seen along the Fly River itself in this district, whilst the Greater occupies the areas further away. Hybrids would be extremely difficult to detect, and whether the two species do hybridize here is still unknown. One lek of Greater Birds has been in use for over two decades.

**Observations from Obo**

Obo is a small airstrip and distribution station sited on the Fly River just north of the Strickland confluence, lying in the middle-Fly wetlands about 200 river miles inland. Ok Tedi Mining Ltd sponsored some surveys in 1994–95 for the Asian Wetland Bureau, and the records here were made whilst a member of that team, unless otherwise stated. Very little has been published about the area.

**LITTLE BITTERN** *Ixobrychus minutus*

Jaensch (1995) recorded four calling birds in June 1994, flushing a probable pair—which strongly suggested that breeding occurs in these vast wetlands. Various other individuals were seen in December 1994 and April 1995. It can be assumed that a resident breeding population is present, which may perhaps be seasonally augmented by Australian migrants.

**GLOSSY IBIS** *Plegadis falcinellus*

Counts of 973 at dusk at Lake Daviumbu on 2 December, and 400+ at Lake Ambuve on 4 December show the significance of the area for this species during the austral summer. None were seen in April 1995.

**MAGPIE GOOSE** *Anseranas semipalmatus*

The area holds good numbers during the austral summer, with 250 at Lake Pangua on 2 December and 150 at Lake Owa on 3 December 1994. Much smaller numbers were present in April 1995, and nests were found.

**GARGANEY** *Anas querquedula*

4 at Lake Pangua 2 December, 12 at Lake Owa 3 December, 38 Lake Ambuve 4 December 1994. The species is sparse in Papua New Guinea and this may be a significant wintering area.